

WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON INVASIVE SPECIES

Jim Doyle, Governor

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For Immediate Release

Multicolored Asian Lady Beetles in Wisconsin: Foe or Friend?

Madison--The first multicolored Asian lady beetles in the US were collected in Louisiana during 1988. The first specimens in Wisconsin were found in 1994 in Grant County, and by 1996 were familiar to citizens statewide. The Multicolored Asian Lady beetle (*Harmonia axyridis*) is native to eastern Asia. It is not known exactly how this non-native beetle species became established in the United States. There had been numerous attempts to establish this beetle as a biological control agent of insect pests such as aphids, but there is no evidence that these intentional releases were successful. Because the beetles first appeared near New Orleans, it is more likely that they were accidentally introduced after hitching a ride on a ship.

Multicolored Asian lady beetles have negative impacts on human health and aesthetics, on the fruit industry, and on native lady beetle populations. As an invasive species, this alien beetle is of concern to Governor Jim Doyle: "Wisconsin's homeowners and fruit producers are burdened every year by the invasion of these beetles. We must work to find the best and safest ways to minimize their effects."

Most infamous among this insect's impacts are the large congregations found on sides of buildings during the fall when Asian lady beetles are known to migrate and form aggregations at overwintering sites; often homes or other buildings. Thousands of beetles may then move inside to spend the winter rent-free. The trigger for fall migration is the first hard frost after mid September. The next sunny day above 60° F will start the invasion. With the unseasonably warm temperatures this fall, most of Wisconsin has not yet seen these building invasions.

People often report that the beetles bite. The bite is more of a pinch and is harmless. Lady beetles defend themselves by bleeding from their joints. Therefore, if handled roughly they can stain carpets, walls or curtains. Repeated exposure to the beetles and their body fluids can cause allergic reactions in some people.

Fruit damage from the Asian lady beetle has been seen in the fall on apples and raspberries. It is believed that the beetles are seeking the sugars in the ripening fruit. Commercial apple orchards are found in 46 of Wisconsin's 72 counties, comprising about 7,400 acres and producing about 56 million pounds of fruit worth over \$9 million per year. "The production of fruit and related products is an important part of Wisconsin's economy and culture," cautions Governor Doyle. "If Asian lady beetles are having negative

effects on our industries, we must find ways to control them." Also, if beetles are harvested with grapes, they cause an off-flavor in wine and grape juice.

A negative ecological impact of these non-native insects is the displacement of native lady beetles in the last decade through competition for food and habitat. There may be as many as 100 species of lady beetles native to the Midwest. Like the Asian lady beetle, our native lady beetles feed on many different kinds of soft-bodied crop and garden insect pests (*e.g.*, aphids and scales). Unlike the Asian lady beetle, our native lady beetles do not gather in homes to overwinter.

While there are negative aspects of multicolored Asian lady beetle becoming established in the United States, this non-native insect has a positive role to play in Wisconsin agriculture. In its native Asian range, the multicolored Asian lady beetle consumes scale and aphid pests on trees. Here in Wisconsin, farmers are grappling with the soybean aphid, an exotic insect pest also native to Asia that can cause significant yield reduction and economic loss to farmers. University researchers in Wisconsin have found the multicolored Asian lady beetle to be one of the most numerous predators of soybean aphid.

The best defense against Asian lady beetle invasions is to seal a home or building through caulking, screening or plugging openings with expanding foam so the beetles cannot get into walls or attic spaces. There are a number of insecticide sprays that can be applied to the outside of buildings during late September or early October to kill and repel the beetles before they get in. You may wish to hire a professional pest control company to make the application. In any event, a vacuum cleaner or broom is often the best response once beetles have come indoors. For more information on control of multicolored Asian lady beetle, see: http://wihort.uwex.edu/pests/GardenFacts.htm

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